

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 DHA-02 /073 W

-----111074 190905Z /20

R 190657Z JUL 77

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8110

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT SF

SUBJ: NATIONAL PARTY LEADERS DEBATE IMMORALITY AND
MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS

REF: PRETORIA 3425 AND 3301

1. SUMMARY: STATEMENTS BY CABINET MINISTERS PIK BOTHA AND HENDRIK SCHOEMAN THAT SOUTH AFRICA'S LEGISLATION FORBIDDING INTERRACIAL SEXUAL RELATIONS OR MARRIAGE IS UNNECESSARY HAVE STIMULATED WIDE PUBLIC DEBATE AND OPEN CONTROVERSY AMONG NATIONALISTS. UNDER VERKRAMPTE (CONSERVATIVE) PRESSURE, SCHOEMAN SUBSEQUENTLY DENIED HE ADVOCATES REPEAL OF SUCH LAWS, WHILE BOTHA IS YET TO MODIFY HIS STAND. WITH LEADING CABINET VERKRAMPTE TREURNICHT SPEAKING OUT AT LENGTH ON THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT IF THE DISPUTED LEGISLATION WERE DISCARDED, THE CONTROVERSY HAS BECOME AN ELEMENT IN THE NATIONAL PARTY POWER STRUGGLE. END SUMMARY.

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2. ON JULY 5, AGRICULTURE MINISTER HENDRIK SCHOEMAN ASSERTED AT A PUBLIC MEETING IN VERWOERDBURG THAT SOUTH AFRICANS DID NOT NEED THE IMMORALITY AND MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS. THE STATEMENT, APPARENTLY UNPRECEDENTED IN A GENERATION OF NATIONALIST RULE, CREATED AN IMMEDIATE SENSATION. SCHOEMAN WAS SUPPORTED BY FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA WHO WAS QUOTED ON JULY 6 AS SAYING THE TWO

LAWS "ARE NOT NECESSARY FOR OUR SURVIVAL." ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE DEPUTY MINISTER TREURNICHT STEPPED IN QUICKLY TO POINT OUT HIS TWO COLLEAGUES HAD STRAYED FROM NATIONALIST POLICY; THE GOVERNMENT HAD ONLY RECENTLY REJECTED THE THERON COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION FOR REPEAL OF IMMORALITY AND MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS. AS BOTHA LATER CONFIRMED TO THE AMBASSADOR, SCHOEMAN AND BOTHA WERE HEAVILY PRESSURED BY VERKRAMPTE NP MEMBERS AND SOME CABINET MEMBERS TO RECAUT AND ENDORSE THE PARTY POSITION. THE NEXT DAY, JULY 7, THE CITIZEN, A DAILY NEWSPAPER NORMALLY SUPPORTIVE OF NATIONAL PARTY POLICY, SURPRISINGLY APPLAUDED SCHOEMAN AND CALLED FOR REPEAL OF THE DISPUTED LAWS BECAUSE "ONE THING ABOVE ALL ELSE MAKES OUR NAME STINK ABROAD--AND THAT IS LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONALIZED RACIAL DISCRIMINATION." A SIMILAR STAND WAS TAKEN BY CAS DE VILLIERS, DIRECTOR OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ASSOCIATION, AN INSTITUTION ALSO CONSIDERED COLOSE TO THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT. THIS BACKING WAS NOT ENOUGH FOR SCHOEMAN. THE SAME DAY HE ISSUED A STATEMENT REGRETTING THE CONTROVERSY AND ASSERTING HE HAD MADE IT CLEAR IN HIS JULY 5 REMARKS THAT THE LIGISLATION COULD NOT BE REPEALED; HE SAID HE ENDORSED THE DECISION TO REJECT THE THERON RECOMMENDATION FOR REPEAL. BOTHA, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS SO FAR RESISTED THE PRESSURE ON HIM AND REFRAINED FROM FURTHER PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE ISSUED.

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3. LIVELY PRESS DEBATE CONTINUED AND SOME LESSER NATIONALISTS VENTURED STANDS ON THE ISSUE, MP TOM LANGLEY ASSERTING THE ESSENTIALITY OF THE TWO LAWS, WHILE AMBITIOUS JUNIOR MP LOUIS NEL EXPRESSED THE OPPOSITE VIEW. ON JULY 12, IN A SCATHING ATTACK ON INDIVIDUALISM AND LIBERALISM, TREURNICHT UNCOMPROMISINGLY ANALYZED THE CONSEQUENCES FOR APARTHEID IF THE IMMORALITY AND MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS WERE REPEALED. HE ASSERTED THE SUPREMACY OF THE COMMUNITY--OF "FOLK IDENTITY"--OVER THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL "TO COMMIT IMMORALITY." REPEAL WOULD STRIKE AT THE HEART OF APARTHEID. WHERE WOULD A MIXED COUPLE LIVE, HOW WOULD THEIR OFFSPRING BE RACIALLY CLASSIFIED AND WHERE WOULD THEY GO TO SCHOOL, HE ASKED.

4. GIVEN THE NATIONALIST PERSONALITIES INVOLVED, THERE IS GOOD REASON TO RELATE THE CONTROVERSY TO A NATIONAL PARTY POWER STRUGGLE. POLITICAL COMMENTATORS SEE THE CENTRAL CONTEST AT THIS POINT AS ONE OF THE AMBITIOUS, HARD-DRIVING TREURNICHT USING THIS ISSUE TO REPLACE SCHOEMAN AS VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE TRANSVAAL NATIONALISTS AT THE SEPTEMBER PARTY CONGRESS. THAT, SO THE REASONING GOES, WOULD ENABLE TREURNICHT TO

BUILD HIS CONSTITUENCY FOR AN EVENTUAL CHALLENGE OF
TRANSVAAAL CHAIRMAN CONNIE MULDER, WHO HAS REMAINED
SILENT ON THE IMMORALITY ISSUE.

5. COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER SCHOEMAN'S
JULY 5 REMARKS WERE IN THE NATURE OF A SLIP OR A
DELIBERATE TRIAL BALLOON. WHATEVER THE INTENTION,
THE RESULT HAS BEEN AN UNUSUAL CONTROVERSY AMONG
NATIONALISTS IN PUBLIC. ITS EFFECTS WILL BE
FELT AT THE COMING NATIONAL PARTY PROVINCIAL
CONGRESSES IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, THOUGH PRIME
MINISTER VORSTER (ALSO SILENT ON THE ISSUE FOR
THE MOMENT) IS NOT LIKELY TO PERMIT THE DISPUTE TO
REACH MAJOR PROPORTIONS. AS FOR THE IMMORALITY AND
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MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS, IT IS SAFE TO ASSUME THAT
THEY WILL BE RETAINED BECAUSE (A) THE PARTY TOOK
A STAND AGAINST REPEAL DURING THE RECENT PARLIAMENT,
(B) THE CONSERVATIVES REGARD THEM AS ESSENTIAL TO THE
PERPETUATION OF APARTHEID, AND (C) VORSTER IS NOT LIKELY
TO PUSH A SECOND MAJOR ISSUE WITH THE RANK AND FILE WHEN
HE WILL HAVE HIS HANDS FULL IN GETTING SUPPORT
OR CHANGES IN THE WESTMINSTER SYSTEM.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DEBATES, RULING PARTY, APARTHEID, MARRIAGES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 19-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PRETOR03539
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770268-0101
Format: TEL
From: PRETORIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770743/aaaabknn.tel
Line Count: 145
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c5629a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 PRETORIA 3425
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19-Jul-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1818208
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: NATIONAL PARTY LEADERS DEBATE IMMORALITY AND MIXED MARRIAGES ACTS
TAGS: PINT, SF
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c5629a67-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009